MEMO

DATE: August 30, 2007

TO: Energy and Environment Committee

FROM: Daniel E. Griset, Program Manager, 213.236.1895, griset@scag.ca.gov
Justus Stewart, Assistant Regional Planner, 213.236.1829, stewartj@scag.ca.gov

SUBJECT: Proposed Program to Promote Comprehensive and Integrated Water Resources Planning in the Region

BACKGROUND:

This memorandum responds to a request from the Chair of the Water Policy Task Force that called for an outreach program that would bring statewide attention to the need for legislative support of comprehensive, integrated regional planning for resources, including water management. The proposed outreach program described below will be coordinated with the draft goals and outcomes of the Water Resources Chapter of the Regional Comprehensive Plan now being developed for final Regional Council consideration later this year.

THE PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM:

SCAG's growth forecasting and visioning efforts, known as the Compass 2% strategy, are designed to provide a meaningful and realistic strategy for absorbing the growth that the region is anticipating over the next 30 years. This strategy has been proposed to minimize the negative impacts of this growth on resources and to maximize resource and infrastructure efficiencies throughout the region.

While the patterns of this growth in people, housing, and jobs can vary from community to community, the Compass 2% strategy highlights a regional pattern by which growth can be guided towards greater community success and sustainability. The foundation for realizing these essential benefits is the innovative linkage of regional transportation infrastructure investments, air quality attainment practices, land use planning and entitlement, open space protection, and water resources management. Without these linkages, the return on these investments and management practices will fall far short of their potential. With these linkages, investments and management practices guided by the Compass 2% strategy have a much greater chance of turning our growth challenges into quality of life benefits.

Using this growth strategy addresses the region's need to succeed in meeting its obligations under AB32 and PM 2.5 attainment. All of these issues are addressed through SCAG's regular transportation and air quality planning processes, and are subject to Program Environmental Impact Reviews.

Along with transportation infrastructure, air quality resources, land use planning, and open space protection, water resources management has growing importance to the region. Patterns of growth and development have enormous impact on water availability and water quality, as well as water-related hazards such as flooding. If the region is to provide a safe and dependable water supply to its growing population and businesses, it must invest in a future with higher levels of water reliability and stewardship.

In the Water Chapter of the Regional Comprehensive Plan now under development, SCAG is forging a regional planning framework to guide these regional water investments and management practices. This framework considers future growth patterns, transportation systems, and related greenhouse gasses in three focus areas: water supply, water quality, and integrated watershed planning. These have significant overlap with the four areas addressed by the statewide policy effort: water supply, water quality, flood hazards, and open space management.

- The availability of more local water supply is achieved with increased conservation, recycling and reuse, stormwater management, and creative implementation of conjunctive use. These local resources cushion against the potential limitation and loss of imported supplemental water from the Sacramento and San Joaquin Delta and the Colorado River. Additional supplies from desalination will depend on technological advances and environmental acceptability.
- Water quality is improved when pervious surfaces are protected and created. These surfaces allow for retention and natural treatment of stormwater and other water, along with infiltration for soil "cleaning," before adding to useable groundwater supplies. This priority in regional water management not only eliminates water impairments and water losses that result in costly burdens for local governments, it minimizes the cost of new infrastructure and maintenance and maximizes the open areas that contribute to greater urban satisfactions and system sustainability.
- Poorly managed land use is typically associated with a growth in the impervious surfaces that create higher levels of stormwater runoff. This type of land cover also increases the speed of stormwater runoff, elevating the risk of flooding and the need for increasingly costly infrastructure to protect life and property. It also results in water losses that occur when flow rates reach such levels that water is not retained for infiltration as it flows quickly across the landscape. Flooding risks for developed areas of the region not only apparent in highly paved communities but also in the in alluvial fan floodplains continuing along the base of our mountains.
- The loss of open space resulting from poorly guided growth patterns deprives a watershed of its ability to slow, hold, and filter water prior to recharging groundwater aquifers. In addition, it requires the construction of expensive mechanical infrastructure to replace the loss of what otherwise would be the "natural services" provided by open areas. In addition to these expenses, this infrastructure further extends the complications created by expanded impervious areas.

The development of a planning framework for regional water management needs to be based in two constraining factors: performance and financing.

As with SCAG's other mandated planning efforts, performance-based outcomes are an important tool to ensure effective implementation. Performance outcomes can avoid the one-project-at-a-time syndrome that has characterized growth and water management in the past. A performance-based plan requires that certain system-wide goals be achieved, and within that framework projects can be selected based on their contribution toward those goals. Performance outcomes allow flexibility in project criteria and management, as progress toward the goals is monitored and program requirements are adjusted as necessary.

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A fiscally constrained plan ensures that the water planning not only meets needs, but that it can realistically do so within existing financial conditions and resources. Financial constraints avoid the potentially catastrophic pitfall in which funding shortfalls will prevent the delivery of a water project or program.

FISCAL IMPACT:
There is no material fiscal impact resulting from this SCAG outreach effort.

Reviewed by:
Division Manager

Reviewed by:
Department Director

Reviewed by:
Chief Financial Officer